S06E06: Brewer - Sloan Lecture- The Oneidas, the Best Land, and the Erie Canal - By Susan Brewer

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Speakers

Jordan Loewen-Colon, Podcast Narrator
Derrick Pratt, Host
Susan Brewer, Lecturer

Jordan Loewen-Colon, Podcast Narrator

00:00 --> 00:10
Hello and welcome to the Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery podcast.
00:11 --> 00:16
The producers of this podcast would like to acknowledge with respect the Onondaga Nation,
00:17 --> 00:23
firekeepers of the Haudenosaunee, the indigenous peoples on whose ancestral lands Syracuse University now stands.

Derrick Pratt, Host

00:23 --> 00:38
Thank you all again for coming out for this symposium on the Erie Canal and the Haudenosaunee.
00:39 --> 00:49
It's been a great day so far, really powerful speakers thus far, and I'm happy to introduce another great speaker, Susan Brewer.
00:49 --> 00:55
She has spent 25 years as a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.
00:56 --> 01:01
She is a fellow Madison Countyite. I don't know if that's what you call us.
01:02 --> 01:11
But she recently retired and has published the excellent book, The Best Land, which is available in the back as well.
01:11 --> 01:12
I highly recommend checking that out.

01:13 --> 01:19
Before we get started, just wanted to give a few quick plugs, I guess.
01:20 --> 01:28
There was a lot of conversation in the last talk about how do we continue to tell these stories and expand this narrative a bit more.
01:29 --> 01:36
The museum was lucky enough to partner with the William G. Pomeroy Foundation to sponsor Bicentennial Research Project,
01:36 --> 01:45
which aimed to help me to call on scholars to submit papers to the museum.
01:45 --> 01:52
I'm proud to say we got 10 submissions that are pretty good and cover a wide range of topics.
01:52 --> 01:53
So please watch out.
01:53 --> 02:00
We'll be releasing a book in the next year of all the compiled essays that are not sparing commands narrative.
02:01 --> 02:04
Yeah. And I encourage you to enjoy these talks.
02:05 --> 02:08
We try to have similar quality speakers throughout the year.
02:09 --> 02:15
Next month, our Sloan Lecture Series, we will have a criminal justice forum.
02:16 --> 02:19
So the first talk is going to be on the history of policing on the Erie Canal.
02:20 --> 02:24
And then the second talk, we have Amy Huffnagel from the Sing Sing Prison Museum.
02:25 --> 02:33
It is also the bicentennial of the founding of Sing Sing, the first group of prison incarcerated people at that prison.
02:34 --> 02:38
We're shipped on the Erie Canal from Auburn.
02:39 --> 02:45
So she's going to be talking about the Erie Canal's role in development of the mass incarceration system.
02:45 --> 02:49
So that should be an interesting talk as well.
02:49 --> 02:53
Anyway, I'm done with my commercials.
02:53 --> 02:55
Now here is Susan.
02:56 --> 02:57

Thank you.
Susan Brewer, lecturer

02:57 --> 02:58
Thank you, Derek.
03:00 --> 03:05
I have to write down my remarks because my book covers 400 years of history.
03:05 --> 03:15
So I have to edit a lot in what I want to do today about the best land and the Oneida's and the Erie Canal.
03:16 --> 03:22
So the Erie Canal ran through our family farm in Oneida, New York.
03:23 --> 03:27
It is right here in the trees.
03:27 --> 03:44
And as a kid, it was a big adventure to hike along the Quaselone Creek, which is right here, all the way to the aqua pot that carried the canal over the creek.
03:44 --> 03:53
I knew the Erie Canal did not go through everybody's backyard, but I just took it for granted that it went through ours.
03:54 --> 04:05
And I also took for granted the feelings of love and stability I grew up with on our farm, which I once heard my grandfather refer to as the best land in Madison County.
04:05 --> 04:13
When I was in high school in the 1970s, the United Indians claimed that the land rightfully belonged to them.
04:14 --> 04:24
In court, they argued that long ago, New York State had acquired their land in violation of federal law and they won their case.
04:24 --> 04:28
And I remember feeling confused about that.
04:28 --> 04:35
I thought that the Oneidas probably were right about their land and I did not want to lose our farm.
04:36 --> 04:44
In seventh grade social studies, we had learned about the original inhabitants, the Haudenosaunee or the people of the Longhouse.
04:45 --> 04:54
But the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cougas, Senecas, and Tuscarora had disappeared from our history books after the American Revolution.
04:56 --> 05:02
Yet 200 years later, the Oneida Indians were still in Oneida and claiming their territory.

05:04 --> 05:13
And I, at the time, I wondered, you know, what happened on the land I called home and why didn't I know anything about it?
05:14 --> 05:17
The answer, it turns out, was in my backyard.
05:18 --> 05:24
So my grandfather called our farm the best land because of its flat, fertile fields.
05:25 --> 05:35
Others considered it to be the best land because it was crossed by the most important east-west route in North America.
05:35 --> 05:48
So this image of the eastern United States provided by satellite shows that there's only one relatively flat route by land or water through the Appalachian Mountains.
05:48 --> 05:57
People could travel up the Hudson River, through the Mohawk Valley, to Oneida Lake, and reach the Great Lakes.
05:57 --> 06:03
The Haudenosaunee knew the power and importance of this location.
06:04 --> 06:07
European empires fought for control over it.
06:08 --> 06:14
General George Washington, as we heard a few last talk.
06:14 --> 06:17
General George Washington considered it to be vital.
06:17 --> 06:25
General George Washington, as we heard a few last talk about the best land.
06:25 --> 06:36
So that is between the hills to the south and the swamp, the Great Swamp and Oneida Lake to the middle.
06:37 --> 06:43
So that is why the best route west went through the best land.
06:44 --> 06:51
So it is crossed by the Great Trail that connected the Haudenosaunee Nations.
06:51 --> 06:57
It is now called the Genesee Road or the Seneca Turnpike or Route 5.
06:58 --> 07:04
And that was to the south of this aerial photograph of our farm on the southern border of it.
07:05 --> 07:06
I mentioned the Erie Canal.
07:07 --> 07:12
When I was a kid, the New York Central Railroad went right in front of our farm.
07:12 --> 07:15

And then it was moved to the back fields.
07:16 --> 07:21
And then the New York State Threadway runs right through the north to the north of our farm.
07:23 --> 07:33
So this transportation system right here transformed Oneida land, New York State, and the United States.
07:34 --> 07:42
So the story of the Erie Canal is celebrated as a triumph of innovation and enterprise.
07:42 --> 07:49
It is also the story of the ruthless and corrupt dispossession of the Haudenosaunee.
07:49 --> 07:55
And on the best land, the story of the Erie Canal is a story of love and betrayal.
07:58 --> 08:13
So I knew that my great-grandparents, Frank and Jenny Clement Brewer, had purchased the farm from the grandchildren of a Frenchman named Angel de Ferrier and his native wife, Raleigh Denny.
08:14 --> 08:17
Before that, the land that belonged to the Onidas.
08:18 --> 08:30
So I traced my family of European settlers and Pali's Oneida Mohawk family to find out where they were from and how they came to live on the best land.
08:32 --> 08:36
So we've already seen this map today, which tells you something.
08:36 --> 08:44
In the 17th and 18th centuries, my family and colleagues lived in the Mohawk and Skoharie valleys.
08:45 --> 08:50
My ancestors were Dutch, French, and German and English speakers.
08:51 --> 08:55
Many of them came to the continent as indentured servants.
08:56 --> 09:00
And they associated land with freedom.
09:01 --> 09:13
They learned native languages, served as interpreters, and seeking security and opportunity, located themselves as close as they could to Haudenosaunee territory.
09:15 --> 09:24
Pali's mother was Mohawk Turtle clan, and her father was a Frenchman who was taken captive and adopted by the Oneida Bear clan family.
09:26 --> 09:30
So Pali was born in what is now Middleburg in Skongary.
09:32 --> 09:39

She and her siblings spoke Mohawk, Oneida, and French at home, and Dutch, German, and English with the neighbors.
09:41 --> 09:45
So generations of the Denny family served as interpreters.
09:46 --> 09:50
So both my family and Pali's were go-betweens.
09:50 --> 09:58
The sort of people who were useful to natives, settlers, Haudenosaunee leaders, and Pali religions.
10:00 --> 10:16
So in response to native complaints about white encroachment on their land, the British in 1768 hoped to control settlement by drawing a line of property between native and English territory.
10:17 --> 10:28
So the boundary, which started at the Oneida carrying place, which was the portage between the Mohawk River and Wood Creek.
10:28 --> 10:32
that connected to Oneida Lake.
10:33 --> 10:39
That's the carrying place that was guarded by Fort Stanwix, present-day Rome.
10:39 --> 10:52
The border, this boundary line, headed south from, also called the Fort Stanwix Treaty Line, headed south and then west.
10:53 --> 11:02
And what it did was it divided Oneida territory.
11:02 --> 11:12
So the easternmost Oneida town of Oriska or Oriskini was on the so-called English side of the line.
11:12 --> 11:21
The main Oneida town at Oneida Castle was on the native side of the line.
11:21 --> 11:25
I think this line, in so many ways, just signaled the trouble to come.
11:26 --> 11:39
Because this, you know, we talked about that ancient trail that crossed through central New York, and this line is supposedly establishing a barrier.
11:40 --> 11:41
On the north-south barrier.
11:41 --> 11:49
When the American Revolution broke out, native and settler families split apart over what to do.
11:49 --> 11:56

Some declared loyalty to the king, some supported the rebellion, and others advocated neutrality.
11:57 --> 12:10
For example, most of the Mohawks of Schoharie fought against the American colonists, but Polly's family chose to stand with the Oneidas, who sided with their rebel neighbors against the British.
12:10 --> 12:16
So Polly's father served in the same militia regiment with mine, Vorba.
12:16 --> 12:21
When the war ended, the Oneidas believed they had made the right decision.
12:22 --> 12:33
In gratitude, the newly independent United States guaranteed by treaty that the Oneidas would be secure in the possession of the lands on which they were settled.
12:33 --> 12:44
New York State, however, was in a hurry to extend its control over the main route west and all Haudenosaunee territory.
12:45 --> 12:52
So using pressure and deceit, the state acquired most of the Oneidas' six million acres.
12:54 --> 13:08
And after the war, Polly's family had left Schoharie and settled at Oriska, or Oriskany, the easternmost Oneida town.
13:10 --> 13:17
So this is a petition from the Oneidas at Oriskany.
13:18 --> 13:23
It was undated sometime following the American Revolution.
13:23 --> 13:27
It is signed by John Denny, Polly's brother.
13:29 --> 13:41
And it is signed by the leading warriors of Oriska, including Polly's brother, the Wolf Clan war chief.
13:42 --> 13:49
And Shagwagyantha, a warrior also known as Henry Cornelius.
13:50 --> 13:55
So their descendants are here today, and I want to recognize them.
13:55 --> 13:57
So Becky Karst.
13:58 --> 13:59
Becky, raise your hand.
14:00 --> 14:00
Okay, this is Becky.
14:01 --> 14:14

Becky not only lived next door to my family on the best land, but she also generously shared her extraordinary research of Oneida family history.
14:15 --> 14:17
And Dick is here, Dick Lynch.
14:18 --> 14:19
Dick, would you just raise your hand?
14:19 --> 14:22
I know you don't like doing this, but I appreciate it.
14:22 --> 14:35
Dick Lynch graciously talked to me about his happy memories of fishing and swimming in Guasalong Creek when he was a kid,
14:35 --> 14:46
and also his unhappy memories about trying to explain United land claims cases to angry local people.
14:46 --> 14:50
So this talk today is really all about the three of us and our ancestors.
14:51 --> 14:55
And I want to thank them for being amazing companions.
14:55 --> 14:58
So, okay, now back to the 1790s.
15:01 --> 15:14
Oneidas of Oriska petitioned New York State to honor their promise to respect Oriska as an Oneida town.
15:15 --> 15:19
And New York State broke their promise.
15:19 --> 15:22
New York State wanted control of the carrying place.
15:23 --> 15:26
And General Philip Schuyler, for one, had plans to build a community.
15:26 --> 15:33
So the people of Oriska, Long Polly, and her family relocated to the remaining Oneida territory.
15:33 --> 15:45
So by the 1790s, the Oneidas retained a 300,000-acre reservation, which included parts of present-day Madison and Oneida counties.
15:46 --> 15:59
The Oneidas had held on to the most valuable part because the main road west cut through the center of their remaining reservation.
16:01 --> 16:11
So in the interest of full disclosure, I'll say that during this time, my ancestors settled illegally as squatters on the hills south of the main road.
16:11 --> 16:28

And Polly and her family settled first at Canasaraga, where the Canasaraga Creek crossed the Genesee Road.
16:29 --> 16:42
This map refers to John's, that's Holly's brother, who ran a very well-known inn at Canasaraga in the 1790s and early 1800s.
16:43 --> 16:52
And then Polly and her family relocated to the best land, which is in the center of the reservation, where Poisson Creek crosses the main road.
16:52 --> 17:01
So this was a village, a small village of Oneida's west of Oneida Castle, the main Oneida village.
17:03 --> 17:08
And it was a town called Colossalon after the Greek.
17:08 --> 17:12
It's now called Wompsville after early September.
17:12 --> 17:25
So Polly's family were useful to the Oneidas here at the center of the reservation on the main road as go-betweens and interpreters.
17:26 --> 17:33
And the Oneidas initially welcomed Polly's husband, Angel de Ferrier.
17:34 --> 17:39
Now, Angel was the son of a provincial nobleman from Western France.
17:39 --> 17:49
And after attending military school, he enlisted at age 18 in the bodyguard of Louis XVI and served at the Palace of Versailles.
17:50 --> 17:56
So this is his enrollment certification as a member of the king's bodyguard.
17:57 --> 18:00
His career was cut short during the French Revolution.
18:01 --> 18:08
Angel fled to the United States, made his way to Cazenovia, met the French-speaking Denny family, and married Polly.
18:09 --> 18:14
So at the Oneidas request, Angel de Ferrier served as their agent.
18:14 --> 18:26
While Oneidas asked Angel to accompany them to Albany, where he witnessed treaties of purchase between the Oneidas and New York state made in violation of federal law.
18:26 --> 18:29
which said that treaties must have federal law.
18:30 --> 18:37
The Oneidas compensated Angel for his services with grants of land along the turnpike.
18:37 --> 18:42

So by this map here, what's now called the Seneca turnpike.
18:43 --> 18:48
And this is the land that the Oneidas had granted Angel de Ferrier.
18:48 --> 19:02
And this is a pretty common practice that the Oneidas would place people they considered to be allies or friends on the border between their reservation and white settlement.
19:02 --> 19:19
So this map shows what the United reservation looked like when DeWitt Clinton toured the state to investigate a new tour canal that would connect the Hudson River to the Great Lakes.
19:20 --> 19:24
While on this tour, Clinton visited Angel and Polly.
19:24 --> 19:35
And his journal contains one of the few eyewitness descriptions we have of the couple and Polly's family at the time they were living on the best land.
19:35 --> 19:43
So Clinton described Angel as a man of genteel manners, sensible, and well-influenced.
19:43 --> 19:51
He described Polly as, quote, a well-behaved woman of civilized manners and habits.
19:52 --> 19:55
He did not say whether he discussed the canal.
19:55 --> 19:59
Plans for the canal were put on hold during the War of 1812.
20:00 --> 20:05
Oneida warriors once again served alongside American troops.
20:05 --> 20:08
While the warriors were away, more squatters moved on.
20:09 --> 20:18
And the war reinforced the determination of New York State to improve transportation between the east and west for that canal.
20:20 --> 20:30
So to build the canal along the best route, the state by 1815 needed one more piece of Oneida land, and that was the best land.
20:32 --> 20:38
By then, some Oneidas had complained to state officials that they no longer trusted Angel to act in their interests.
20:40 --> 20:47
The state ignored this petition by Oneidas.
20:47 --> 20:55
And a group of Oneidas, including members of Polly's family, traveled with Angel to Albany to negotiate the Treaty of 1815.
20:55 --> 21:01
Which was made, again, without federal approval as required by law.

21:01 --> 21:07
So I don't know why the Oneidas, this group of Oneidas, agreed to Sal.
21:07 --> 21:11
The best reason is probably they needed the money.
21:12 --> 21:17
Polly's father had told DeWitt Clinton that times were hard for the Oneidas.
21:17 --> 21:23
And they may have felt that they might as well be compensated for land taken over by squatters.
21:23 --> 21:26
That the state was not removing.
21:27 --> 21:34
So the Treaty of 1815 broke the heart of the aged Oneida chief, Sconandoah.
21:34 --> 21:43
Although he had signed earlier treaties with the state, Sconandoah did not support this one, which included his home in Oneida Castle.
21:44 --> 21:46
He spoke before Council on Oneida.
21:47 --> 21:50
Our children's hearts are sick, he said.
21:51 --> 22:00
He recalled the strength of his younger days and said he can now only mourn out a few words and then be silent.
22:00 --> 22:03
His voice would soon be heard no more.
22:04 --> 22:09
He said he had warned his people to take care, be wise, be straight.
22:10 --> 22:16
Drink no strong water, for it makes you mice for white men who are cats.
22:17 --> 22:19
Many a meal have they eaten of you.
22:20 --> 22:23
He concluded, papers are wicked things.
22:26 --> 22:35
After his death a year later, Sconandoah's speech was headlined in newspapers as, quote, instances of Indian genius.
22:36 --> 22:41
The press celebrated Sconandoah as the white man's friend.
22:41 --> 22:55
It told the story of his conversion to Christianity, his rejection of Al-Khapal, his conviction that God was angry with the Indians for their wickedness, and his grief over the actions of cheating white men.

22:57 --> 23:12
The newspaper's publication of Sconandoah's words about his own past strength and glory, his weakness and decline and the loss of land made it sound as though the old chief was the last of the Oneidas.
23:13 --> 23:15
With his end came theirs.
23:15 --> 23:28
It was also part of a trend in the print media of the early republic to publish these expressions of Native eloquence.
23:28 --> 23:35
The purpose of these publications was not to change the policy of dispossession.
23:35 --> 23:47
Instead, the speeches served as confirmation that the vanishing of indigenous people was to be considered tragic but inevitable.
23:47 --> 23:59
The natives were not vanishing, however, which is why the era of the Erie Canal was also known as the era of Indian removal.
23:59 --> 24:13
Removal ideology, writes historian Christina Snyder, excluded Indians from America's future, claiming that they were not and never could be modern.
24:13 --> 24:19
This way of seeing natives as belonging to the past served to justify their disposition.
24:19 --> 24:37
So listen to what aspiring author Nathaniel Hawthorne of Massachusetts had to say when he traveled on the section of the canal called the Long Level that stretched between Rome and Syracuse and crossed the best land.
24:37 --> 24:51
Hawthorne's boat passed a canal boat, he said, that was manned by three Indians, whom he writes, gazed at us in silence.
24:51 --> 25:10
He thought, "Perhaps these three alone among the ancient possessors of the land had attempted to drive benefit from the white man's mighty projects and float along the current of his enterprise."
25:10 --> 25:19
Hawthorne presents the native men as silent, alone, passive, and having nothing to do with the canal.
25:19 --> 25:36
In contrast to Hawthorne's assumption that native people did not belong on the engineering wonder of the age, Oneidas traveled and worked on the canal as they did the turnpike, the New York Central Railroad, and ocean going ships.
25:36 --> 25:41
But that reality did not change the prevailing perception.

25:41 --> 25:45
The canal was progress and the Unites were in its way.
25:45 --> 25:53
The canal turned Wompsville into a little boom town that cooks, wheel drivers, smiths, hotels, shops, and taverns.
25:53 --> 26:03
And along the towpath workers found factory jobs as New York State became the number one state in industrial production.
26:03 --> 26:21
As more and more people settled in central New York, the Unites were under intense pressure to leave from officials, land speculators, reformers, and the New York State Indian commissioners, who also served as turnpike canal and railroad developers.
26:21 --> 26:35
So after the canal was finished, the state rewarded Angel de Ferrier with the first track of the best plant from the Treaty of 1815.
26:35 --> 26:42
So there are letters of patent witnessed by DeWitt Clinton, who was then governor of the New York State.
26:42 --> 26:49
And that is how Angel and Polly became owners of the best plant.
26:49 --> 26:58
So it consisted of 650 acres north of the turnpike where it was crossed by Quaselone Creek.
26:58 --> 27:13
For a time, Polly's family lived around her until they too were confronted by this removal effort.
27:13 --> 27:27
And I want to say a little bit about this in detail because removal on the best land resembled what historian Jean M. O'Brien described as dispossession by paperwork.
27:27 --> 27:34
So for Polly's brother, Martinez Denny, who was the tribal interpreter, it went like this.
27:34 --> 27:45
The Treaty of 1815 had set aside 20 acres of land occupied and improved by Martinez overlooking Quaselone Creek.
27:45 --> 28:01
The Surveyor, as you can see here, only set aside 10 acres for Martinez.
28:01 --> 28:13
Martinez petitioned the state explaining that 10 acres was not enough to support his family and requested a correction be made in accordance with the treaty.
28:13 --> 28:28
The Surveyor General, Simeon DeWitt, vouched for Martinez, who he said, quote, "lives in the manner of a civilized man and is fully competent to prudent management of his land."
28:28 --> 28:40

But no change was made, and Martinez eventually sold his plot to Polly and Angel, and he and his family later left from Wisconsin.
28:40 --> 28:57
So Polly's nephew, Abraham Denny, had 100 acres, which is right here, located right here, set aside by treaty for him and his large family.
28:57 --> 29:02
Abraham Denny, had 100 acres of property, and he and his family were not allowed to sell his property.
29:02 --> 29:10
Abraham was pressured to sell by a prominent landowner who held mortgages on his lot, which I should add was about to be crossed by the railroad.
29:10 --> 29:17
Abraham's family petitioned in protest of this sale, but it went ahead.
29:17 --> 29:26
Abraham Denny, had 100 acres of property, and his family, for a time, lived next to Polly until they, too, left for Wisconsin.
29:26 --> 29:38
So I feel like this is important to mention because Polly's family had experienced the loss of their home in Skoharie, in Ariskany, in Kanesaraga.
29:38 --> 29:49
And at the best land, they were trying a new strategy of owning their property like white people while maintaining Oneidas.
29:49 --> 30:13
But this only worked for a time, even though officials constantly pressured Oneidas, who did not leave, to adopt individual property ownership, which they equated with civilized behavior and assimilation.
30:13 --> 30:29
So even though Polly's relatives did not succeed in hanging on to their property.
30:29 --> 30:38
And so within decades, most of the Oneidas who stayed on their ancestral lands ended up as tenants.

Jordan Loewen-Colon, Podcast Narrator

30:38 --> 30:41
Do you need help catching up on today's topic?
30:41 --> 30:44
Or do you want to learn more about the resources mentioned?
30:44 --> 30:50
If so, please check our website at podcast.doctrineofdiscovery.org for more information.
30:50 --> 30:56
And if you like this episode, review it on Apple, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

30:56 --> 30:58
And now, back to the conversation.

Susan Brewer, Lecturer

30:58 --> 31:07
So Abraham's land would eventually be bought by his cousin, Charles de Ferrier, Polly and Angel de Ferrier's son.
31:07 --> 31:18
And this is Abraham's land, which is crossed by the railroad as of 1815.
31:18 --> 31:33
And Polly and Angel's children lived as white people on Vestland along Quasile Creek, which they kept in family.
31:33 --> 31:40
Now, as for Polly, her success led to a different kind of removal.
31:40 --> 31:44
After the death of her husband, she managed her farm.
31:44 --> 31:46
She sold land to the railroad.
31:46 --> 31:48
She sat for her portrait.
31:48 --> 31:50
And she prospered.
31:50 --> 32:02
But the achievements of a native woman clearly troubled local historians and commentators who frequently obscured or erased her identity.
32:02 --> 32:16
So although her son Charles had requested that he be buried next to his beloved mother, his obituary only mentioned his distinguished French father without a word about his native mother.
32:17 --> 32:26
So Polly and her husband had survived revolutions that overturned the world they knew as children and rendered them homeless.
32:26 --> 32:51
So in the decades that followed, Angel would be honored as an early settler while Polly and memories of her were removed to the shadows.
32:51 --> 32:57
So in the 1890s, Polly's grandchildren needed a tenant to work their farm.
32:57 --> 33:05
And they hired my great grandparents to be to live on the best land as tenant farmers.
33:06 --> 33:12
So my great my grandfather, DeBern and his brother and sister were born in the tenant house.

33:12 --> 33:23
And by the time this photo was taken in the early 1900s, the brewers were in the process of purchasing the farm from Polly's grandchildren.
33:23 --> 33:32
So after generations of getting by as tenant farmers, my family became property owners of the best land.
33:32 --> 33:44
So at about this time, the Onidas were in danger of losing the last of their original territory in a controversial foreclosure case.
33:44 --> 33:51
But the court ruled that the reservation of 32 acres belonged to the Onida nation.
33:51 --> 33:57
Some decades later, the Onidas launched their land claims case.
33:57 --> 34:05
And I think this newspaper article, this is from the Syracuse Herald American, illustrates a typical local perspective.
34:05 --> 34:31
It includes a photo of the 32 acre reservation showing the trailers provided for the Onidas by the federal government, which suggests a temporary presence in contrast to the neighboring farm up the road, which is described as having belonged to that owner for three decades.
34:31 --> 34:44
And it quotes that farmer asking, how would you feel if everything you've had in the world for most of your life might be taken from you?
34:44 --> 34:50
Just a few people seem to realize that the Onidas already knew how that felt.
34:50 --> 35:05
In an unusual letter to the editor, a local property owner wrote, what was done to the Onidas and all Native Americans is a moral dilemma that has stuck in the American conscience since the beginning.
35:05 --> 35:15
By the early 2000s, there had been another reversal of fortunes as illustrated by the front page of our local paper.
35:15 --> 35:22
Our farm, like many farms, had been sold. The best land was being eyed as an industrial site,
35:22 --> 35:29
convenient to the railroad and the New York State Thruithway, which is the Erie Pinale.
35:29 --> 35:36
It's now owned by Green Empire Farms and covered by greenhouses that grow fruits and vegetables that
35:36 --> 35:43
are shipped by railroad and through way to grocery stores around the West. The Unitas, meanwhile,

35:43 --> 35:49
had built the Turning Stone Casino on the Thruithway and become the biggest employer in the area.
35:51 --> 35:59
And the article below describes a meeting of Oneida Nation representatives and other Native
35:59 --> 36:06
leaders with President George W. Bush who ordered federal agencies to respect tribal sovereignty
36:06 --> 36:12
and self-determination. As the land claims cases dragged on,
36:12 --> 36:19
a landowners group called Upstate Citizens for Equality picketed at Oneida-owned businesses,
36:19 --> 36:29
waving American flags. To this group, equality meant assimilation, not sovereignty and self-determination.
36:31 --> 36:38
So my hometown for a number of decades was divided over whose history was to be heard and respected.
36:39 --> 36:46
People disagreed over who belonged and who did not. Then about 12 years ago, the land claims
36:50 --> 36:58
dispute and protests were laid to rest for the time being when the Oneida Indian nation negotiated and gained
36:58 --> 37:15
In the 1820s, the traveler on the long level described throwing coins to Onondaga and Oneida children who ran alongside the Canaanites.
37:16 --> 37:21
He recalled that he tried to get the Indian children to speak, but they would not.
37:23 --> 37:33
I thought it likely that Polly's nieces and nephews who had grown up on the best land had run along the canal because generations of Brewer children had done it too.
37:34 --> 37:36
And we were not silent.
37:37 --> 37:40
But we also might have refused to speak to a stranger.
37:42 --> 37:48
It was easy for me to picture Oneida children racing, shouting, teasing, and laughing.
37:48 --> 37:56
Imagine if this painting showed Oneida and Onondaga children running along the canal.
37:57 --> 38:00

Or if it showed Native men operating a canal boat.
38:02 --> 38:11
Such a depiction would revise the story of the canal as a triumph of innovation and enterprise in a land without indigenous.
38:11 --> 38:17
So I've learned that the home I love was built on betrayal.
38:18 --> 38:21
My feelings of confusion persist.
38:22 --> 38:28
I feel grateful to my four mothers and fathers for who struggled to find a home.
38:29 --> 38:38
I know that Polly's family repeatedly asked that justice be done, promises kept, and treaties upheld.
38:39 --> 38:50
And that even though state officials urged Oneidas to become civilized, whatever that is, and run and own property as individuals,
38:51 --> 39:02
And recognize that the Oneidas who lived on the best land had done all these things, still accomplished their removal through paper.
39:03 --> 39:10
I know now that for generations my family owed their security and livelihood to the Haudenosaunee.
39:10 --> 39:20
I know that my ancestors benefited from the policies of dispossession and removal conducted by national, state, and local authorities.
39:20 --> 39:31
I know that developers, local historians, journalists, map makers, and surveyors have played a part in silencing Native voices and erasing indigenous people from their land.
39:31 --> 39:40
Even as those people have raised families, held jobs, denounced corruption, submitted petitions, and taken their cases to court.
39:42 --> 39:56
And I've learned enough about the people of the best land to see them not as heroes and villains, but as human beings who could be despicable, brave, greedy, and loving.
39:56 --> 40:05
And I've learned that Polly's family and mom have been connected for 400 years. Thank you.
40:05 --> 40:07
You make it sound so simple.
40:07 --> 40:08
Don't I?
40:08 --> 40:13
I didn't think, I was trying not to make it sound simple.

40:13 --> 40:15
You and I both knew it wasn't.
40:15 --> 40:16
I know.
40:16 --> 40:19
You know, Becky and I laughed and cried a lot over this.
40:19 --> 40:21
Oh, you know it.
40:21 --> 40:27
To use treaties to take away the land.
40:27 --> 40:35
Yes, so the Constitution and federal law said only the United States has the power and authority to have treaties.
40:35 --> 40:47
Now, there is this little thing in Albany where you have some bureaucrat in the state offices saying, you know, that very thing is true.
40:47 --> 40:56
That it's only the United States has power to conduct treaties with Native nations.
40:56 --> 40:58
So why don't we call them something else?
41:00 --> 41:01
We'll call them.
41:02 --> 41:04
So they start to call them treaties of purchase.
41:05 --> 41:12
They try to fudge it to say that they or they just refer to it as the purchase.
41:13 --> 41:16
So they're doing both things at the same time.
41:16 --> 41:17
They're calling it a treaty.
41:17 --> 41:23
They're acting as though it's a treaty, but they are referring to it as the purchase.
41:23 --> 41:28
So even when I was a kid, you would hear people say, oh, that was the purchase of 1815.
41:29 --> 41:37
And, you know, I was just trying to rename it so that it wouldn't sound like it had been a violation of the federal law.
41:37 --> 41:46
Now, there is some controversy about the treaties made before the second constitution.
41:46 --> 41:49
The treaties made under the Articles of Confederation.
41:49 --> 41:52

There are some confusion about that.
41:52 --> 42:06
Native lawyers have argued that those treaties guarantee the same thing, that it's only the federal government that can make treaties with Native nations.
42:06 --> 42:10
But the courts have fudged that in a way.
42:10 --> 42:12
You know, there's no president at that point.
42:12 --> 42:15
It's only Congress under the Articles.
42:15 --> 42:20
And so it has those have been allowed to stand.
42:20 --> 42:26
But the Supreme Court has said that those treaties made by New York State are illegal.
42:26 --> 42:30
You know, those of us who grew up there.
42:34 --> 42:39
It's astonishing to me in so many ways how little we knew or understood.
42:39 --> 42:50
And I think that just even to begin coming to grips with it all, I felt it was really important to to understand what happened there.
42:50 --> 42:52
But it is very complicated.
42:53 --> 42:57
You know, there are several treaties or several parts of land.
42:57 --> 43:04
And that's why I decided to focus on one piece of land and just the these two families, because I thought.
43:06 --> 43:08
It's so hard to take in and.
43:09 --> 43:11
It's difficult enough.
43:12 --> 43:14
With just one piece of land.
43:14 --> 43:23
And I also think if you tell the story about families, it it it becomes more about real people.
43:24 --> 43:26
And I think that's important, too.
43:27 --> 43:36
And I know I and I say I say in my book, I do not see my family or Polly's family as representative of any larger group.
43:36 --> 43:38

You know, I I I.
43:38 --> 43:40
But I do feel that.
43:40 --> 43:48
To have connection to these people in the past and why they did what they did and what they did.
43:48 --> 43:56
It's just much more helpful if you see them as as as human beings with families.
43:56 --> 44:09
And so I feel like that is a way to to connect to this story that makes it just much more accessible for you and less.
44:11 --> 44:14
Less long ago and far away and alien.
44:14 --> 44:23
And if it's your ancestors, it means something to you because every step along the way they are building a life for you or not.
44:23 --> 44:24
Right.
44:24 --> 44:29
And you can see that with the Oneidas who never give up.
44:30 --> 44:35
On trying to get these treaties upheld and enforced.
44:36 --> 44:46
So I think that those are those becomes those become powerful stories, even though they're very painful stories.
44:47 --> 44:48
Oh, I'm sorry.
44:49 --> 44:49
Yes.
44:49 --> 44:59
So my grandfather called that when I was a kid, I was hanging around with him and he just looked at his cornfields and said, this is the best land in Madison County.
44:59 --> 45:04
And he was not much of a talker and he would never brag about anything.
45:04 --> 45:08
So I remember this as a very big deal that he said this.
45:08 --> 45:09
Right.
45:09 --> 45:17
And but then as I was doing research on the land, I heard I read DeWitt Clinton refer to it as the best.
45:19 --> 45:30

And I, you know, read other references to, you know, Oneidas farming it as the best too.
45:30 --> 45:38
So I think that it just for me as I should be, you know, I never intended to be a farmer.
45:39 --> 45:41
I was a reader and a nerd.
45:41 --> 45:43
And so I was going to be a historian.
45:43 --> 45:49
But I consulted all the farmers in my family and they told me why it was such great land.
45:49 --> 45:54
And I even tried to read soil surveys.
45:54 --> 46:00
But I also saw it was the best land as I did my research because of its location.
46:00 --> 46:09
And because of that location, even though the United States government had promised to protect Oneida land.
46:11 --> 46:26
At the same time, the United States was not really opposed to New York State acquiring it.
46:26 --> 46:31
You know, it was not as though the U.S. government, U.S. government was weak.
46:33 --> 46:44
It there are lots of comments by George Washington and others that they sort of wish New York State would be a little more patient about grabbing this land from the Haudenosaunee.
46:45 --> 46:48
But they don't actually do much about it.
46:49 --> 46:54
So I think that it was also the best land because it was the way west.
46:56 --> 47:02
And it made New York State amazing English and wealthy and wealthy.
47:08 --> 47:13
So part of the Supreme Court cases, I definitely think that's back at the table.
47:13 --> 47:30
But there was also, the United's also asked that they be somewhat financially compensated for money that was for the land that was purchased for them at a tenth of what it was worth.
47:30 --> 47:33
At the time it was purchased by New York State.
47:34 --> 47:38
And then became much, much more valuable when the canal and the railroad went through.
47:38 --> 47:50
But that also was considered to be too disruptive was the term that the Supreme Court was too disruptive to ask for financial compensation.

Conversation between Susan Brewer, Lecturer and Another Person

47:52 --> 48:18
I've seen this in other places in the same country, in various communities, where people like Washington, politicians, and speculating, they pressure Native people to share land with the crown, to become individual defenders.
48:18 --> 48:38
And I think, ultimately, they would say that's how civilized people live. Really, they might not be able to buy the land. So there's just another way to get them to become human beings.
48:38 --> 48:50
I mean, they, whoever, you know, the money people, speculators, all the social system operators, you know, like the guy who got one of them right now.
48:50 --> 49:02
They're always trying to get things to benefit themselves and get other people to allow them to be a manager. It seems like that was the case in the right place.

Susan Brewer, Lecturer

49:02 --> 49:18
Yes. And I know I went into great detail about this dispossession by paperwork, because it's your point exactly. These are the people who are doing, trying to hold on to their land by doing what the authorities request. Right.
49:18 --> 49:30
And then when it is violated, they actually very politely petition and say, would you please uphold your own law? And it is, it's not done. Right.
49:30 --> 49:53
And so you see, I see that over and over again in numerous cases in Oneida, where people who are not cooperating with the physical removal out west are agreeing to stay and do this individual ownership with the promise, with the expectation they'll be able to keep their land.
49:53 --> 50:22
And yet it is, and when, and when fraud is committed, which happens in Oneida, you know, the Oneidas try to take their cases to court and lose. So the courts don't uphold them. The state doesn't uphold them. And so you're right. I mean, this is, it, it's another tactic. And it's so, it's just so, I mean, hypocrisy is all over this, of course, but it's this idea that,
50:22 --> 50:51
it's a big sacrifice to own land as individuals because it breaks up that tribal unity is not something that these people entered into lightly, just trying to hold on to their homes. And after all that, to then be dispossessed, to write petitions, to write letters, to hire lawyers, to take your cases to court.
50:51 --> 51:15

this is a horrible burden on them. These people are not terribly wealthy at all. And some of these court cases can drag on for years and years. And so it is just another tactic to achieve the same goal.
51:15 --> 51:37
And so is this pressure to assimilate as well. That's another way to achieve. So there's just what I found is that the Oneidas who stay in Oneida are incredibly tenacious, incredibly tenacious and patient and tough.
51:39 --> 51:48
The producers of this podcast were Adam D.J. Brett and Jordan Loewen-Colon. Our intro and outro is social dancing music by Oris Edwards and Regis Cook.
51:49 --> 51:57
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51:58 --> 52:02
If you like this episode, please check out our website and make sure to subscribe.
52:02 --> 52:02
Thank you.
52:02 --> 52:03
Thank you.
52:03 --> 52:04
Thank you.
52:04 --> 52:05
Thank you.
52:05 --> 52:06
Thank you.
52:06 --> 52:10
I hope they...